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Description Notes Press release about an announcement made by G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery, Chairman, U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Veterans' Affairs regarding a press conference given by Secretary Schweiker of the Department of Health and Human Services.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Ralph Casteel
225-9154

SECRETARY SCHWEIKER'S "NEW" DATA TURNS OUT TO BE "OLD" DATA

The Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee of the U. S. House of Representatives, G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery (D-Miss.), announced this morning that Secretary Schweiker of the Department of Health and Human Services has needlessly caused undue alarm and concern by his press conference yesterday on supposedly new data that had been brought to his attention pertaining to "aerial dumping of herbicides" on American troops in Vietnam.

The "new data" had been made public more than a year ago -- September 16, 1980 -- by Department of the Air Force witnesses before the Subcommittee on Medical Facilities and Benefits of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. The record of this hearing was published. A representative of the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services served as Chairman of an Interagency Work Group appointed to study the adverse effects of phenoxy herbicides, including Agent Orange, in humans and was a witness at the same hearing in which this "new data" was announced.

Chairman Montgomery said, "I regret that Secretary Schweiker did not check with his staff concerning the disclosure of this information at our Committee hearing last year. It serves no useful purpose to hold press conferences such as that held yesterday by the Secretary. Such procedures at the highest level of government obviously cause much emotional upheaval for Vietnam veterans and their families and for my colleagues and others who are doing everything possible to determine whether there are long-term health effects due to exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides used in Vietnam."

Montgomery said, "I intend to take this matter up with Secretary Schweiker personally, and I hope he will begin to work with the Congress, the Veterans Administration and others in a concerted effort to resolve these problems rather than going off on his own with press announcements that serve no useful purpose. I will ask him to join all of us in the Congress who are working diligently to resolve this complex issue and to join in supporting congressional initiatives contained in H. R. 3499 that will provide health, education and employment benefits for all Vietnam veterans. Working together will hopefully bring about positive results."

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September 24, 1981